



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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22 March 2006

### IND101112.E

India: The All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF), including its objectives and activities, and its relationship with the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) (2004 - 2006)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Current information on the All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF) and its links to the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. A specialist in Punjabi politics at the University of Missouri told the Research Directorate in 28 February 2006 correspondence that he had little information on the current activities of the AISSF. The AISSF is described in a report on terrorism by the Mackenzie Institute, an independent organization focusing on issues of political instability and organized violence (Mackenzie Institute n.d.), as the old student wing of the Akali Dal party (Mackenzie Institute May 2003, Ch. 2), while the European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI.net) Website includes the AISSF on a list of militant groups in India (ECOI.net 9 Mar. 2006). According to the Mackenzie Institute, by the 1980s, the AISSF had perpetrated a series of robberies, assassinations and bombings "in the name of Khalistan" (ibid.). The AISSF was divided into two factions, one led by Daljit Singh Bittu (also Bittu) (Professor emeritus 28 Feb. 2006; *The Tribune* 28 Sept. 2005; *The Sikh Times* 7 Oct. 2005; Mackenzie Institute May 2003, Ch. 2), and the other by Manjit Singh (ibid.). Manjit Singh reportedly led the more violent of the two factions, and was believed to have been involved in the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182 (ibid.). The University of Missouri specialist, however, wrote that the faction headed by Bittu, which is also known as the Sikh Student Federation (SSF), was the most violent AISSF faction in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Professor emeritus 28 Feb. 2006; ibid. 17 Mar. 2006). In March 2004, a new AISSF faction was created with the suffix "Majha" and had as its president Kashmir Singh Sangha (*The Tribune* 21 Mar. 2004). Information on the total number of AISSF factions could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In 2004, *The Times of India* stated that Manjit Singh had dissolved the AISSF (28 Apr. 2004a). Manjit Singh's announcement followed the defection of his brother-in-law and president of the AISSF, Harminder Singh Gill, to the Congress Party (*The Times of India* 28 Apr. 2004b; ibid. 28 Apr. 2004a). Harminder Singh Gill was subsequently named the general secretary of the Punjab Congress Committee (ibid. 4 May 2004). In 2005, three former leaders of the AISSF joined the All-India Shiromani Akali Dal party (*The Tribune* 20 Apr. 2005). Meanwhile, the AISSF named a new president backed by Manjit Singh, Tarlochan Singh, and members reiterated their support for the Shiromani Akali Dal party and its leader, Parkash Singh Badal (*Hindustan Times* 7 May 2004). Tarlochan Singh later disclosed the intention of the federation to set up AISSF units in all districts and villages in Punjab state (*The Tribune* 7 July 2004).

In early 2004, "[v]arious factions" of the AISSF announced they would form a political party to contest the next Lok Sabha (Indian parliamentary) elections (ibid. 3 Feb. 2004). The announcement was made by AISSF leaders Sarbjit Singh Sohal and Bhagwan Singh, who stated that unity among the factions had been achieved (ibid.). Information on whether AISSF factions created a political party to run in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Two members of the AISSF, Gursharan Singh Gama and Daljit Singh Bittu, who were serving a life sentence for the 1986 murder of a politician's son, were acquitted by the Supreme Court in November 2005 (*The Tribune* 8 Nov. 2005). Daljit Singh Bittu claimed to lead the Shiromani Khalsa Dal party, *The Tribune* reported (ibid.).

The Mackenzie Institute stated in its 2003 report on terrorism that "the ISYF is the international arm of the [AISSF]" (May 2003, Ch. 2). According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), the ISYF, the main objective of which is the establishment of an independent Sikh state, had "[i]n the past ... operated in Punjab and maintained offices in many countries" (n.d.). The SATP also reported that Bhagwan Singh, an AISSF leader, along with an ISYF associate, had at one time attempted to "revive" ISYF activities in India (SATP n.d.). In March 2002, the Indian government banned the ISYF under the country's *Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA)* (ibid.).

According to the SATP, the ISYF retained a support base in Canada, with a gurdwara in Vancouver reportedly acting as the control centre of the organization's activities in the country (ibid.). In February 2002, the spokesperson for the ISYF in Canada announced that the organization was being disbanded because it had been characterized as a terrorist organization and, therefore, could not continue to operate (ibid.). On 23 July 2002, the ISYF was included on a list of entities that the government of Canada believes have knowingly participated in,

facilitated, carried out, or attempted to carry out, a terrorist activity (Canada 23 July 2002). The Mackenzie Institute, however, reported in 2003 that there remained two factions of the ISYF that were competing for control of temples and newspapers run by the Sikh community in Canada (May 2003, Ch. 2).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** One oral source did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Publications:** *Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006*, *Political Parties of the World 2005*.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International, Global Security.org, *The Hindu*, Human Rights Watch, Indian Elections Website, Rediff.com, South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, United States Department of State.

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